

# PRESS RELEASE

## Providence Housing Authority



### **"Get Connected" Digital Literacy Initiative Graduates 25 Public Housing Residents**

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#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

PROVIDENCE, RI (May 13, 2014) — In a well-attended ceremony held at the Manton Heights Community Center on Monday afternoon, the Providence Housing Authority (PHA) and its partners celebrated the accomplishments of 25 adult public housing residents who have completed an "Internet Basics" training course as part of the "Get Connected" initiative. Attendees included Senator Juan Pichardo, State Representative Raymond Hull, Jeshenia Brito, City of Providence, Department of Planning and Development, as well as representatives from community partners such as Citizens Bank, Crossroads of RI, and United Way.

"Get Connected" is an innovative public-private partnership between the Providence Housing Authority (PHA), Broadband Rhode Island (BBRI) and educational broadband service (EBS) provider Mobile Beacon offering long-term access to technology for the adult residents of the Manton Heights housing community in Olneyville who participated in the pilot program.

"I am so pleased to see adults take advantage of programs like these to further their education and embrace technology," said Pichardo. "I commend and support their efforts to better themselves and their families."

Two sessions of the six-week digital literacy training course were conducted in the computer lab at Manton Heights. The lab is equipped with eight computers that were donated to the PHA last year by G-TECH. A small (\$5K) Citizens Bank Foundation "Growing Communities" grant awarded to the PHA last summer, allowed the PHA to hire Victor Ramos, an experienced, bilingual Computer Instructor. Ramos offered the classes in English and Spanish using curricula developed by BBRI. Participants who graduated from the "Get Connected" program received a donated laptop computer, a donated 4G Wi-Fi modem, and free Internet service for six months from Mobile Beacon. After six months, participants may sign up for Mobile Beacon's unlimited monthly data plan for \$10/month through the [EveryoneOn.org](http://EveryoneOn.org) national platform. In anticipation of this discounted fee, participants also received financial literacy training throughout the course of the program.

The Housing Authority estimates that only about one-fifth of its residents have Internet access in their home. The heads of these households often experience a digital divide not only with respect to adults in the workforce, but also with their own children, who have become more proficient in using computers.

A lack of experience with basic use of the computer can limit public housing residents in the job search process, as many companies now communicate with job seekers only online. "Companies may be hiring, but you have to apply online, and that's where the fear comes in," said Sorrel Devine, Director for the PHA's Department of Resident Services. "We have seen students overcome this fear, however, in just a few classes."

Each class begins with typing practice so the adult students grow more comfortable with use of the keyboard. Ramos says his approach involves helping the student's problem-solve on their own and empowers them by realizing there is usually more than one way to troubleshoot an issue with a computer.

One student in Ramos's class says this will be the first time she has owned her own computer, and calls the opportunity "a blessing." She adds, "While you're breathing, you always have room to learn."

The PHA hopes to gain an understanding of how the experience affects households over the long term, looking at the ways adult learners will apply their access to technology in

the months after the class is completed. "We'll want to know what they are doing now that they weren't before," says Ramos. "We want to establish some sort of [computer] club." BBRI, Mobile Beacon and the PHA will continue to look toward making this educational initiative sustainable over the long-term. They expect that interest in the classes within the public housing community will intensify as word spreads in the future that a resident who took the class was able to enhance job search skills and land a job offer.

The success and excitement of the Get Connected program is evident as Ramos reports that immediately upon graduating, the first wave of students took it upon themselves to establish a DigiClub so they could continue to share information and support one another. They plan to meet monthly with potluck gatherings in order to **get connected** with their peers and with well-earned opportunities.

The PHA recently secured a 2014 Olneyville Community Fund grant from United Way of Rhode Island to sustain the "Get Connected" initiative. This grant funding will open the door for more Manton Heights residents to benefit from Digital Literacy classes in fiscal year 2015.

*Established in 1939, the Providence Housing Authority owns and manages 2,606 units of public housing and is contract administrator for approximately 2,500 units of Section 8 housing. Approximately 58% of its housing stock is designated for families with the remainder reserved for elderly and/or disabled individuals or families. The PHA's Department of Resident Services (RSD) addresses the social, health, economic and education needs of its nearly 6,000 residents through direct service and creative partnerships and many of the department's initiatives have received awards for best practice. To learn more about the PHA and its programs go to [www.pha-providence.com](http://www.pha-providence.com).*

*Mobile Beacon provides fourth generation (4G) mobile broadband services exclusively to educational and nonprofit organizations across the United States. Mobile Beacon was created by a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is one of the largest national educational broadband service (EBS) providers in the country. Mobile Beacon provides high-speed data services and mobile Internet access on the Sprint network. For more information, visit [www.mobilebeacon.org](http://www.mobilebeacon.org).*

Broadband Rhode Island, an initiative of the Office of Digital Excellence, R.I. Department of Administration, is funded through December 2014 by the State Broadband Data and Development Grant Program (SBDD) as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). The initiative focuses on broadband infrastructure mapping and broadband planning in the State of Rhode Island. Programs address public awareness and education about broadband and study and develop plans to increase adoption rate and broadband usage across all aspects of our lives including in our homes, schools, businesses, libraries, healthcare facilities, public safety and government. To learn more about Broadband Rhode Island please visit: <http://broadband.ri.gov>.

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